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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses issues in the education of mildly handicapped black adolescents. Among ways recommended to meet the needs of this population are promoting affective education, developing a positive self concept, fostering the student's motivation, teaching social behavior through role playing and videotapes, developing students' ability to organize, encouraging students' special talents in sports or other areas, helping students obtain survival strategies, becoming sensitive to the needs of black students, and identifying learning styles and matching them with appropriate teaching styles. In addition, suggestions are made in the curriculum and instructional area, including providing opportunities for incidental learning and teaching students to break down tasks. (CL)

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Strategies for Meeting the Needs of the Mildly Handicapped Black Adolescent

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STRATEGIES FOR MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE
MILDLY HANDICAPPED BLACK ADOLESCENT

In this country where the majority population is white, black adolescents have historically been discriminated against, and excluded in many instances from the economic and political mainstream. For the black adolescent that is handicapped, the situation is exacerbated. Though the black handicapped person suffers the same indignities as other handicapped persons in this country, he also faces unique problems as a result of racial and cultural differences (Countee, 1977).

Whether one likes it or not, race and color are factors which influence education. Children are not just children and educators must learn that one's race and color affects one's identity and behavior in this country (Erickson, 1968).

Yes, the handicapped black adolescent faces unique problems and these problems are partly due to the history, identity and different value structures of blacks and in part due to the lack of attention and awareness of institutions. The problems of the black adolescent are further magnified by the myth of black inferiority which is sustained not only by the majority population in the United States, but also by people the world over, who seem to equate blackness with academic, moral, and general incompetence. This myth unquestionably affects the black child mentally. Furthermore, many blacks hate themselves for being black. The hate stems from the teachings of this society and is reinforced by economic deprivation, and cultural degradation.

Surprisingly however, the best teachers of self hate have often been our black families and friends who have subconsciously disparaged blackness (McLaughlin, 1976).

Because of America's history of racial exclusion of blacks from the mainstream, many blacks have learned to adopt a non-threatening, invisible profile in which they subtly accept and recognize their status as second class citizens. It thus takes an extraordinary amount of determination on the part of a black handicapped person--a subgroup within a minority-to seek out programs and assistance for him/herself (Countee, 1977).

A search of the literature reveals a paucity of materials on methods for remediation of mildly handicapped black adolescents. Nonetheless, the past few years have witnessed a dramatic growth in interest in programming for black exceptional children at the secondary level. The pressures put on secondary schools, since the mid 1970's to develop programs for the exceptional adolescent have been tremendous. However, many educators in their eagerness to help an age group that has been denied services for years, have often come to hasty and sometimes shortsighted decisions (Alley, 1979).

While black youngsters in need of help at the secondary level cannot wait for research to provide answers to crucial questions, neither should they be expected to endure educational programs that have been conceived on limited knowledge. For example, many secondary programs for black mildly handicapped adolescents are merely extensions of the same model used for elementary children. To make the same assumptions about secondary students as are made about elementary children is to ignore the critical changes that occur in the developmental process. Likewise, to approach all black secondary mildly handicapped students with the watered down curriculum that is traditionally used

with mentally retarded populations would be to deny the potential these black adolescents have for normal functioning and adjustment.

The teachers who teach the mildly handicapped black adolescent, the policemen who arrest them, and the parents who lose sleep over them, need immediate assistance on how to best work with the mildly handicapped students. Therefore, lets explore some strategies for meeting the needs of the mildly handicapped black adolescent.

Affective Education

One approach to working with mildly handicapped black adolescents is affective education. Affective education programs have to do with feelings, attitudes and self-esteem. We must build strength in students so that they can deal with situations in a more healthy fashion. We must also teach students how to respond to those with handicaps, to deal with peer cultures and behavior.

Parents of black children should ask that the affective education component be explored for school curriculums where they do not now exist. Cautions include avoidance of reliance on gimmicky programs or the involvement of teachers who are not trained to do this type of work.

If we are to get students to accept those who are different, then the most effective intervention will be through the way the teacher models acceptance without prejudice. It is essential that the teacher demonstrate proper attitudes and clarify the essence of acceptance.

Developing A Positive Self Concept

Self concept is a major instructional concern that is vital to the mildly handicapped black adolescent. While self concept is an area of concern

for all exceptional children, particularly the handicapped, this is an area of heightened concern for those of minority background (Chinn, 1979).

It has been said that the handicapped black adolescent suffers a "triple whammy." Not only must he cope with his differentness due to his minority status, but he must also face the reality of being handicapped and must struggle with the efforts to maintain or develop a positive self concept. In addition, he must also face the problems of adolescents.

Pepper's (1976) suggestions to improve the self concept of Indian children appears to be equally applicable to the black adolescent.

1. Teach the true history of the different minority groups and the value of these cultures to all students.
2. Value and accept the student as he or she is.
3. Use words that build the student's self esteem and feelings of adequacy.
4. Show faith in the student so he/she can believe in himself or herself.
5. Plan for experiences that are guaranteed to give success.

Fostering Motivation

Motivation is closely associated with self concept, as an enhanced self concept will strengthen the motivation of a student. The development of sensitivity opens the door for the creation of trust between teacher and students. With this trust comes a working relationship. The development of these relationships is obviously not as easy to establish as it is to read about. Trust and respect may take weeks or months, as will the development of sensitivity (Chinn, 1976).

In developing other skills in teaching black mildly handicapped adolescents there are few if any cookbook approaches that can serve the teacher's needs. Enlightenment in cultural diversity and a careful study of the idiosyncrasies of black adolescents coupled with sound teaching techniques, will provide a basic foundation for meeting the needs of the mildly handicapped black adolescent.

Teaching Social Behavior

Educators working with mildly handicapped teenagers need to teach them how to pay attention to feedback, how to recognize it and then how to use it. Socialization for the mildly handicapped adolescent may have to be taught step by step, just as the tasks in reading and math are broken down and accomplished one step at a time.

One method of teaching social behavior to mildly handicapped black adolescents is through role playing. Parents and teachers can re-enact social situations that adolescents find themselves in. Eye contact, a firm handshake, a pleasant greeting, a gently phrased question, a polite interruption, a thoughtful inquiry, and sometimes a needed silence-all of these social skills may need to be taught one by one (Smith, 1979). Videotapes may be helpful to assist the adolescent to see himself as others do. The use of the absurd can also be an effective way to begin teaching adolescents, with the teacher engaging in inappropriate and comical activities.

Organization

Organization is another approach that can be used successfully with the mildly handicapped black adolescent, however, it needs to be taught again and again and reinforced by every available means until habits and procedures

become automatic. The adolescent must consciously program himself to stop, think, figure out what comes first, next, and last, and then go back and check to make sure he did it. This process is very demanding and exhausting, however, checklists should be made up to help the student. Additionally, every stage of each task and each household chore should be outlined for the mildly handicapped black adolescent. He or she should be in on the planning to get an overall view of how to accomplish a task and to see what all the stages are, to check off what has been done, step by step, and eventually internalize the process so that it can be performed automatically. This system applies to mopping the floor, emptying the garbage, delivering newspapers, and making a project for school. It is hoped that this method of breaking down a task, systematically finishing each stage in order, and checking off a list will, with sufficient repetition, become a habit, transferable to all other areas of activity (Smith, 1979).

Developing a Special Talent

It is crucial for the mildly handicapped black adolescent to develop a talent or skill in which he concentrates. Suppose a boy has a knack with machines; find a mechanic who will let the boy work in his garage. Senior citizens are a great untapped resource in our society. Through church groups and interest clubs, they have a great deal that they could offer in working individually with mildly handicapped adolescents. Their calm manner and organization and their available time can make a difference in the life of a mildly handicapped adolescent.

Sports can also open up a whole world, even to an unathletic boy or girl. Step by step, professionals can build up an understanding and appreciation of football, baseball, basketball, golf, or almost any spectator sport.

The ritual and procedure of stadium behavior can be learned and enjoyed. A mildly handicapped youngster with a keen interest in a sport may find purpose and satisfaction as a manager's assistant on a team (Smith, 1979).

Developing Survival Strategies

Teachers should assist the mildly handicapped black adolescent to develop survival strategies. These young people have to recognize their needs and develop their own survival techniques. They need strategies to help them to stick with a problem until it can be solved or successfully bypassed.

One student learned to control his habit of speaking impulsively and thoughtlessly by chewing gum. John achieved the same results by keeping his finger pressed to his chin. Mildly handicapped youngsters who cannot take fast dictation, for instance, might learn to use a tape recorder or work out an arrangement with another student to take the notes in exchange for typing them. Professionals may need to provide some of the strategies, but it is more important for a youngster to learn to devise his own (Smith, 1979).

Developing Teaching Sensitivity

The development of sensitivity on the part of teachers is critical to the adjustment of the mildly handicapped black adolescent. There are some who would argue that only black teachers can teach black students. A poor black teacher is equally as ineffective as a poor white teacher. Segregating black students so that they can have a black teacher is a highly questionable staffing pattern. It is unlikely that any teacher, including a black teacher, can become completely knowledgeable with respect to characteristics and needs of all black students. Sensitivity, therefore, is one of the most desirable qualities in teachers of black students. Sensitivity can be viewed in terms

of responding, appreciating, and allowing differentness. Sensitivity can develop through learning from the students, from the numerous publications on cultural diversity, and by the individual's receptiveness to experiences in cultural diversity available in the community (Chinn, 1976).

Learning Styles

Students with learning problems may have different learning styles. Students may be visual learners, auditory learners, etc. Some students learn best when given opportunities to learn in ways best suited to their motivations and abilities. This is obviously true of mildly handicapped black adolescents as well. The important point to remember is that black adolescents do not within themselves have any homogenous learning style. The statements that attempt to convey learning characteristics of certain minority groups are just not valid (Fair and Sullivan, 1979). Furthermore, it should be noted that teaching styles may be active, passive, facilitative and directive to name a few; however, it is important to remember that the teaching style should match the learning style of the students. We must have a better match between learning styles and teaching styles, especially if we are to be effective with the mildly handicapped black adolescent.

Curriculum and Instructional Stategies

Cruickshank, Morese and Johns (1980) offer many suggestions regarding working with mildly handicapped adolescents, however a number of the recommendations appear appropriate for the mildly handicapped black adolescent, and as a result they are highlighted and suggested for use in working with this student. The suggestions are as follows:

1. Watch for opportunities for incidental learning.

   A. Make a practice of verbalizing directions and positions (north, south, right, left, between, beneath, etc.)

   B. Ask the adolescent to catch the weather report on T.V. and make a game out of predictions.

   C. Keep a calendar of birthdays, and encourage the adolescent to send small but funny cards, or gifts to relatives and acquaintances as surprises. This practice will keep the adolescent in touch with the sequence of the months as well as other calendar characteristics (seasons, number of days in month, number of weeks in month and year).

   D. Comment on time often; estimate aloud how long it will take to prepare the entire dinner, and what time you will need to begin preparation in order to get to the basketball or baseball game.

   E. Play games like "older" versions of "I'm Going to Take a Trip, and I'm Going to Pack--" These are fun for teenagers when the trips are to Outer Space, Africa or Hawaii.

   F. Use the after-dinner table time for short discussions. This is good time to make plans for trips-his, hers, or all or yours; to estimate costs of these trips and of wanted treasures. This is also a good time to air feelings or dilemmas of the parents or the student.

2. Teach the Student to Breakdown a Task. The adolescent should be taught to breakdown a task and eventually he should be able to say, "Now, let's see. The first thing I do is--, and then I will--" and so on to task completion in a stepwise progression.

3. Technology. Techology has not yet progressed far enough to solve all of the problems of the mildly handicapped youth. However, mildly handicapped black adolescents should have every possible piece of technology available to him and he/she should be taught to use every crutch possible in dealing with basic arithmetic, reading, and spelling facts.

Conclusion

We must address ourselves to developing goodness of fit between the learner, the task, the instructional mode, and the environment. Ideal learning conditions appear to bear a direct relationship to the personality and psychological makeup of the adolescent, especially those conditions related to motivation and self concept. Intelligence appears not to be the most significant factor. One cultural factor does appear to be the capacity to image a future.

In the process of selecting teaching strategies for the mildly handicapped black adolescent, educators must realize that teaching strategies should differ, depending upon the individual or group to be taught. Additionally, educators must approach the task of differentiating and understanding the commonalties and uniqueness of the effect that skin color or the absence of skin color and the attributions of status has upon all children in our school system (Johnson, 1976).

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